THE LINK

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A Look at Gaza

This issue of *The Link* is devoted to a look at the Gaza Strip, one of the territories the Israeli government has occupied since the June, 1967 Six Day War.

Gaza is bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, on the south by Egypt, and on the north and east by Israel.

Almost a half million persons live on Gaza today. Most are refugees of the 1948, 1956, and 1967 wars between the Israelis and the Arabs. The area is greatly overpopulated. More than one-third of Gaza's 99.6 square miles consists of sandy soil and barren hills of sandstone.

The Gaza Strip includes the city of Gaza and the towns of Khan Yunis, Rafah and Dier-el-Balah. There are also several large refugee camps, some which contain as many as 50,000 residents.

In many ways, the Arabs of Gaza are forgotten people. They receive the very basic medical and sustenance needs from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and other international organizations. Yet they remain powerless and often abused under the Israeli occupation.

This issue is an attempt to investigate the area—its history, its people, and the problems they face today.

A street scene in UNRWA's Beach Camp in the Gaza Strip, the home of more than 30,000 Palestinian refugees.

Gaza today: an eyewitness report

John P. Richardson, executive vice-president of American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), recently visited the occupied territories to inspect projects which ANERA is conducting there.

Here is part of his eye-witness account on Gaza. The report is dated December 15, 1971.

"The dominant conclusion one reaches from a visit to the Occupied Territories is that, in spite of public denials to the contrary, the Israelis have no intention of giving up one inch of territory they occupy illegally . . . Gaza was the saddest place of all to visit.

"Despite marginal indications of lessened tension in Gaza Town (e.g., removal of walls built to block access to side streets and relaxation of curfew regulations) the level of tension and violence in the camps remains high. During one morning and evening which I was in Gaza, six persons were shot and killed by the Israelis.

"All were officially described as either being on the 'wanted list' or failing to halt on command. No one can ever really know the 'reason,' if any, for the killings.

Inhabitants Dispersed

"I saw the vast blank areas, particularly in Jabalia Camp, where hundreds of refugee homes recently stood. Their inhabitants have been dispersed, some having laboriously collected the blocks from the destroyed homes, and then reassembled them elsewhere. The pastel hues of once-interior walls now seem unintentionally cheerful in their new locations.

"Of the estimated 15,000 refugees dispersed by the Israelis, 3,000 were trucked to El-Arish in Egyptian Sinai. There they have been placed in private and Egyptian government-built homes and flats temporarily abandoned by residents in 1967.

"UNRWA has refused to recognize this action by the Israeli government, with the result that refugees who declined Israeli offers of assistance in El-Arish have to commute to Gaza in order to collect their UNRWA supplies.

"About one-fourth of the deportees have left El-Arish, most drifting back to Gaza to live with friends or relatives."

Torture, threats face prisoners

In its "search for guerilla terrorists" in the occupied territories, the Israeli government has often used torture and threats while interrogating arrested persons.

Amnesty International, the human rights group headquartered in London, has done extensive investigations into Israel's treatment of prisoners.

The following four case studies were printed in its report of April, 1970:

'Mr. A' — from Gaza

Town or place of residence: Jerash Camp — Jordan
Age: 30
Date of arrest: 6 June 1967
Place(s) of detention: ATLIT
Charges and/or trial: Nil
Period of interrogation and/or detention: 2 months-released Aug. 1967
Nature of allegations: After being taken prisoner on the second day of the June war, complainant was kept in solitary confinement for a week. At the end of this period he was beaten up by a group of soldiers, and on the following day taken to a cell where he was strapped to a table and flogged.

During this time he was told to confess that he was a guerilla and asked for information concerning guerillas generally. He was returned to his cell with four broken teeth.

On the following day the procedure was repeated; but in addition he was stood up against a wall, when his chest was slashed with a knife which inflicted seven parallel wounds and at the same time had one arm badly cut. His back and hands were burnt with lighted cigarettes. (Photographs of injuries and medical reports available).

'Mr. B' — from Nablus taxi driver

Town or place of residence: Amman — Jordan
Age: 40
Date of arrest: 19 September 1967
Place (s) of detention: NABLUS — RAMLE — SARAFAND and BEIT LID
Charges and/or trial: Nil
Nature of allegations: Arrested at 23.00 in his house and taken immediately to NABLUS police station, whereupon he was beaten up by six officers and subjected to electric shocks to various parts of his body until he lost consciousness at about 4.00.

On coming round he was given a glass of urine to drink; when he refused to do so was again beaten unconscious. Complainant was later transferred to SARAFAND where he was subjected to intensive interrogation concerning guerillas which, on occasions, entailed the following treatment:

(i) being handcuffed with hands behind his back and having his feet shackled, then suspended naked by the wrists from a window bar. In this position he was whipped all over his body, a small rubber stick being used exclusively on the genitals.
(ii) being placed in the centre of a small room into which opened two doors opposite to each other. One arm would be tied to one open door and the other to the opposite door. Four soldiers would then rapidly shut and open the doors many times in succession.

'Mr. C'—from Ramallah motor mechanic

Town or place of residence: Amman — Jordan
Age: 26
Date of arrest: 12 July 1968
Place(s) of detention: RAMALLAH — SARAFAND
Period of interrogation and/or detention: 7 months
Charges and/or trial: Nil
Nature of allegations: Arrested in his house at 3.00 in the morning and taken to RAMALLAH H.Q. where he was beaten into unconsciousness. This interrogation continued for 3 weeks. He was later transferred to SARAFAND where interrogation entailed the following treatment:

(i) being handcuffed, hands behind back and feet shackled and being suspended by the wrists from a window bar. In this position he was whipped and one of the interrogators would stand on his feet shackles greatly increasing the strain.
(ii) attaching alligator clips to his ears and genitals and passing an electric current through them.
(iii) inserting a biro type refill into the penis until it bled.
(iv) running water on the weals produced by whipping and then puffing sulphur on them.
(v) crushing finger tips between the door hinges and frame.
(vi) having a water hose inserted into his mouth and the tap turned on. An interrogator would then stand on his stomach, forcing the water out of his mouth.

'Miss D' — from Nablus a student

Town or place of residence: Amman — Jordan
Age: 18
Date of arrest: 14 March 1969
Place(s) of dentention: NABLUS
Period of interrogation and/or detention: 43 days—released 26 April 1969
Charges and/or trial: Nil
Nature of allegations: Arrested with her mother and sister and segregated. Interrogated at Nablus Police Station. Asked whether she knew a certain girl, on her replying "no" she was grabbed by the hair by the chief interrogator and thrown to the floor where she was beaten with a metal rod and also kicked and punched.

Subsequently she was beaten in front of her mother, who was accused of hiding a member of the guerillas in her house. When her mother pleaded with the interrogator to stop beating her daughter, she was struck on the forehead with the rod which cut it open.

Book review authors

Due to an oversight, the names of two authors of book reviews in our last issue were omitted.

The review on *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* was written by Dr. Henry Fischer. Hugh Auchincloss wrote the review on *Kuwait Journey*.

U.N. Report

Homes destroyed, rights deprived

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was particularly distressed over the recent demolition of homes and deportation of refugees from the Gaza Strip by the Israeli government.

The following excerpts are from a special report (UN document A/8383) to the General Assembly from the Commissioner General of UNRWA. The report is dated September 17, 1971.

"The Commissioner General submits the following special report on the effect on Palestine refugees of recent operations carried out by the Israeli military authority in the Gaza Strip, in which shelters in refugee camps were demolished and about 15,000 persons displaced, some of them to places outside the Gaza Strip . . . "

"On 8 July 1971, while the Minister of Defense of the Government of Israel was in Gaza, he asked to see the Agency's Field Director for the Gaza Strip and told him that in view of the ineffectiveness of other measures in dealing with violence in Jabalia refugee camp, the Israeli authorities intended in the near future to move numbers of the inhabitants from the camp so that roads could be built or widened for security purposes.

No Housing in Jabalia

"The Minister said it was not intended that the refugees should be left without shelter, but, because of the urgency of the measure, new housing outside Jabalia could not be provided in advance of demolition. Displaced persons would have to be accommodated in other camps or in Gaza town or in El-Arish outside the Gaza Strip. . . ."

"United Nations Headquarters were informed by the Agency of this and other developments. There was no question of the Agency's being asked to agree to this measure, which was taken on the sole initiative and responsibility of the Occupying Power. Without further reference to the Agency, the demolition of shelters began on 20 July in Jabalia camp.

"At a meting in Gaza, on 28 July, at which the Commissioner General expressed his concern and sought more information, the Military Governor of the Gaza Strip said that the operations were limited to Jabalia camp; that the numbers involved would not be out of proportion to the numbers involved in earlier road-widening in other camps (where housing had been provided in advance in the same camp); that there were plans for new housing in the Strip, but action was urgent in view of the killing of 80 persons in a period of five months; that El-Arish was being used

Average accommodation for a refugee family of five is a ten foot square room. In Gaza land is limited, overcrowding inevitable.

only because alternative housing was not available in the Gaza Strip; and, further, that refugees who have moved to El-Arish would be able to return when the new housing was available.

Demolition Extended

"On the basis of this information, it apppeared that about 600 to 800 families, *and in Jabalia only*, would be affected by the operations. Without notification to the Agency, however, the operations were extended to Shati (Beach) camp on 2 August and to Rafah camp on or about 15 August.

"On 6 August, the Commissioner General drew the attention of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the extreme hardship being inflicted on the refugees by the sudden demolition of their homes and their forcible removal at short notice.

"In a *note verbale* of 8 August, the Agency formally protested the action being taken by the Israeli authorities, which appeared to be contrary to General Assembly resolution 2675 (XXV), which affirmed a number of basic principles for the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts, and also to the provisions of articles 49 and 53 of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Inadequate Accommodations Cited

"On 14 August, the Commissioner General pointed out to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs that demolition appeared to be much in excess of the alternative accommodation available. He asked that a halt be called to the operations . . ."

"On 19 August, at a meeting in the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the Commissioner General was informed that the operations had been completed in Jabalia and would be completed that day in Shati (Beach) camp, but that they were still in progress in Rafah and would continue as long as alternative accommodation in the Gaza Strip or in El-Arish or, also, in the West Bank of Jordan was available.

"The Commissioner General was informed that at that stage the homes of 1,515 families, comprising over 10,000 persons, had been demolished. He again called for a halt to the operations, but was told that they must go on. He was also informed that a second phase would take place after up to 800 new houses had been built in four separate areas in the Strip: Khan Younis, Rafah, Dier-el-Balah and

the area between Deir-el-Balah and Gaza town.

"The operations continued in Rafah camp until 26 August. According to the best information at present available to the Agency, about 2,900 families comprising some 15,000 persons, have been displaced from the three camps in these operations, of whom about 350 families have gone to El-Arish, about 30 families have gone to the West Bank, and the rest remain elsewhere in the Gaza Strip . . ."

UNRWA Shelters Destroyed

"Despite assurances given by the Israeli military authorities in the course of the operations, by 14 August about 70 Agency staff members had had their shelters demolished, and some had been obliged to move to El-Arish owing to the absence of readily available alternative accommodation in the vicinity.

"The Agency was asked by the Israeli military authorities to continue to provide services to refugees who were moved. Refugees who are still resident in the Strip are eligible for the medical and educational services provided there and can ask to have their rations transferred to a nearer distribution center in accordance with normal practice. This applies also to those who have had to move to the West Bank of Jordan.

"As regards El-Arish, which is outside the area in which the Agency operates programs, the Agency has been unable to agree to the request by the Israeli authorities that it should provide services there. A refugee family at El-Arish may, however, still pick up its monthly rations at its former distribution center or, if it so requests the Agency, have them temporarily transferred to a more convenient center within the Strip . . ."

"According to reports received by the Agency from the refugees and from its staff, the Israeli military authorities carried out these security operations, in general, in the following way.

Israeli soldiers arrived in the camp (on some occasions, at least, at night), marked shelters for demolition and gave the inhabitants notice ranging from two to forty-eight hours to leave with all their belongings.

"The identity cards of the heads of the families affected were taken away by the soldiers in exchange for receipts. The refugees were told that there was good accommodation for them in El-Arish, but that, if they preferred, they could go to the West Bank of Jordan, or remain in Gaza if they could find unoccupied accommodation there outside their camp and produce the owner's written agreement for its use.

Israeli Assurances Given

"They were also told that free transport would be provided for those agreeing to go to El-Arish or the West Bank of Jordan, that accommodation there would be rent-free for a period and employment was available, and that compensation would be paid for demolished additions they had made to Agency shelters and for privately-built shelters.

"The Agency understands that compensation was also paid for other private property belonging to refugees and affected by demolition, that food for several days was given to those who moved to El-Arish, and that medical attention is available there.

"The Agency . . . believes that about 4,360 rooms built by the Agency, or with its assistance, have been demolished . . . In addition, it is estimated that over 2,000 privately-built rooms have been demolished . . ."

"About 2,500 families must have remained in the Strip, occupying such other empty housing or other permanent shelter as they could find, doubling-up with friends or relatives, or improvising make-shift shelter on vacant land. *It is evident that for many their present living conditions must be worse than before and that the health hazard must be greater.*"

UNRWA: Aid to refugees

United Nations Relief and Works Agency officials describe the Gaza Strip as "the most depressing and depressed area of UNRWA operations."

Of the thousands of refugees registered with the agency, over 200,000 live in the Strip's eight refugee camps. The camps simply are areas where UNRWA has provided huts for shelters and such services as education, basic rations, supplementary feeding, and medical care.

UNRWA has no police or legislative power. The responsibility for maintenance of law and order rests with the occupying power—Israel.

The amount spent to provide each refugee with relief, health, and education amounts to no more than 10 cents a day. About six cents of this amount goes for education, three and one-half cents for health services, and the remainder for relief.

Finances a Problem

Financial problems, which have plagued the organization since 1963, threaten this year to reduce the limited amount of assistance to the refugees.

A naturally increasing refugee population and rising costs of goods on the world market have combined to strain UNRWA's budget to the limits, agency officials said.

1972 is seen as a year of serious financial crisis. The agency's latest budget estimate shows a deficit of $4.7 million if all commitments are to be met. The Commissioner General has repeatedly stated that the agency will be forced to curtail its programs unless a substantially higher level of income is assured. UNRWA's 1972 $51 million budget must be totally financed from voluntary contributions —mainly from governments.

Vital Food Provided

Among these commitments are the monthly food rations for refugees in the Strip. In addition, UNRWA operates supplementary feeding programs which provide hot meals daily to 16,000 children, age 15 and younger.

A milk program offered through the schools and at 23 feeding centers in the Gaza Strip provides a daily portion of milk to about 50,000 children.

About 11,000 pregnant women, nursing mothers, and tuberculosis outpatients receive extra dry rations and protein supplements each month. Almost 40,000 children, ages 6-10, receive a monthly issue of 500 grams, C.S.M. (a corn-soya-milk blend).

As one UNRWA official put it: "Without this outside assistance— which the refugees supplement as they can by barter, the produce of small gardens and work when it is available —thousands of human beings would simply starve to death."

Medical Services Available

In the health field, UNRWA operates nine medical centers on Gaza Strip. Services are also available to refugees at four government clinics. Services include dental care, tuberculosis control, diabetic clinics, care of handicapped children and many other specialized areas.

Maternal and child health is an integral part of the services at each health center. Family planning advice is given at three of the centers.

A school health program, which reaches children over age six, includes reinforcement of immunizations received in pre-school years. Training of midwives at the UNRWA/Swedish Health Center in Gaza Town has enabled UNRWA to provide better maternal care. A tuberculosis hospital at Bureij is financed jointly by UNRWA and the local administration.

Combined with other preventive measures, UNRWA's environmental sanitation program has kept many serious communicable disease from reaching epidemic proportions among the refugees.

Intent on their studies although there is only one book among the three of them, these Palestinian refugee children attend the elementary school in UNRWA's Beach Camp in the Gaza Strip.

Cholera Contained

The outbreak of cholera among refugees in Gaza in fall, 1970, was contained by extraordinary sanitation measures and mass immunization in cooperation with the occupation authorities.

Education is the most expensive item in UNRWA's budget. Agency officials believe it is the most constructive also.

UNRWA, in cooperation with UNESCO, provides nine years of free education to all eligible refugee children. 108 schools attended by 44,000 elementary pupils and 17,500 preparatory students are maintained. About 7,500 refugee children attend government schools in the Strip.

A vocational training center for men in Gaza Town has 508 trainees. Training is offered in metal, electrical, and building trades. 230 fitter machinists, auto mechanics, sheetmetal workers, radio-TV mechanics, electricians, plumers, carpenter/wood machinists, and others graduated from the Gaza VTC in 1971.

College Scholarships Awarded

Refugee graduates of the preparatory schools are able to take the Egyptian school-leaving/college-entrance examination and thus qualify for universities in the Arab countries. The Arab Republic of Egypt awards about 1,000 university scholarships each year to students from the Gaza Strip.

UNRWA seeks to keep the refugees in good health and to educate them for a constructive future.

In this way it is hoped that the Palestine refugees of Gaza will be capable of benefiting from the "just and lasting peace" called for by the Security Council when it at last comes to the troubled Middle East.

Between 1700-1800 hot meals are served each day to children below six years of age at the supplementary feeding sub-center of UNRWA's Rafah camp.

Menuhin tapes available

The Link will review the exciting new cassette-tape series by Moshe Menuhin in our next issue.

The 10-tape series covers Mr. Menuhin's life and views from his childhood in Czarist Russia to the present day.

The tapes are available from: The Center for Cassette Studies, 8110 Webb Avenue, North Hollywood, California 91605.

Mideast papers requested

"Fearing another Vietnam-type involvement for the United States—this time in the Middle East," 12 Americans filed a legal action Oct. 8 in Washington, D.C., to obtain classified government documents.

The studies are said to include contingency plans for U.S. military intervention in the Middle East and papers which have been assembled on the nature, extent, and history of U.S. involvement and commitments in the area.

Named as defendants in the lawsuit were Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of State William Rogers, and Presidential Advisor Henry Kissinger.

Among other things, the papers include a study made at the request of President Lyndon B. Johnson under the supervision of Ambassador Julius Holmes in 1967, and another study commissioned by Kissinger concerning the "circumstances under which American nuclear weapons would be used in the Middle East."

The attorney for the plaintiffs, Mr. Abdeen Jabara, is available for speaking engagements before church, civic and university groups throughout the country. He may be contacted at his Detroit office, 658 Pallister Avenue, or by phone at 313-875-9800.

In Summation . . .

There is little doubt that the Arab residents of Gaza have suffered tremendous hardship under the Israeli occupation.

At its 1120th meeting on March 15, 1971, the United Nations Human Rights Commission condemned the Israeli Government for its "grave violations of human rights as well as its violations of the Geneva Convention in the occupied territories." (UN documents number E/4949, E/CN. 4/1068)

It specifically condemned the following policies and practices of Israel:

(a) Denial of the right of the refugees and displaced persons to return to their home;

(b) Resort to collective punishment;

(c) The deportation and expulsion of the citizens of the occupied territories;

(d) Arbitrary arrest and detention of the citizens of the occupied territories;

(e) Ill treatment and torture of prisoners;

(f) Destruction and demolition of villages, town quarters, houses and confiscation and expropriation of property;

(g) Evacuation and transfer of sections of the population of the occupied territories;

(h) Transfer of parts of its own civilian population into the occupied territories.

The resolution also "strongly deplored" Israel's policy "aimed at placing the population in a general state of repression, fear, and deprivation."

Specifically, the Commission pointed out the following violations:

(a) Requisition of hospitals and their transformation into police stations;

(b) Abrogation of the national laws and interference with the judicial system; and

(c) Refusal to allow the textbooks approved by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for schools in the occuied territories, and the insistence on forcing upon school children an alien system of education."

Despite the condemnation of the international community and despite its public denials, the Israeli government continues its private policies of oppression and annexation of the occupied territories.

THE LINK

aims at maintaining contacts among Americans who believe that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, who would contribute to this goal by spreading understanding of the history, values, religions, culture and economic conditions of the Middle East, and who would—in this context—press for greater fairness, consistency and integrity in the U.S. policy toward that area.

It is published by A.M.E.U. (Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.) whose directors are:

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